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## Behavioral, Cognitive, and Health Benefits of Walking While Listening to Educational Podcasts

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1. **TITLE:**

Behavioral, Cognitive, and Health Benefits of Walking While Listening to Educational Podcasts

2. **RELEVANCE:**

While The Walking Classroom program was initially developed to provide students with an opportunity to get more exercise during the regular school day, in connection with the youth-at-risk population, the two strands that would be most powerfully impacted would be HEAD and HEART. Our views on this impact are informed by the many teacher and student thank you notes we receive and the data provided to us by UNC Chapel Hill researchers who have evaluated our program from a number of perspectives. We have and estimated 2,000 educators using this program with an estimated 75,000 students each year. We survey teachers and students each year And we receive many notes and testimonials from teachers and students who us the program. Teacher report that this approach is an effective way to address different learning styles and improved engagement in school. Students who are often struggling readers have an opportunity to feel smart in the classroom. Rich post walk discussion result and teachers and students see improvement in mood, healthy habits and ability to concentrate. The most commonly used work that students use to describe the program is “fun”, but the next most frequent descriptor is “calm”. As an educational nonprofit, our mission is to donate as many class sets as we can and we prioritize high poverty schools. We feel students in poverty stand to benefit the most from this sort of instructional technology. We have seen some very positive impacts from putting this program to work specifically in at-risk youth programs. Students simply love this approach to learning and it is important to share this information more broadly with the youth-at-risk community.

3. **BRIEF DESCRIPTION:**

This session will highlight the behavioral, health and cognitive benefits of walking while listening to educational podcasts. Improvement in learning, mood and healthy habits result. Attendees will get to experience these benefits first hand when they go for a walk listening to a Walking Classroom podcast. Attendees will Walk. Listen. And Learn.

4. **SUMMARY:**

The Walking Classroom Institute is a 501 c 3 nonprofit that provides a program of educational podcasts that students listen to while they walk. There is a clear link between exercise and cognitive function, and walking while listening to podcasts capitalizes on this link. While this approach to learning is good for all students, it is especially beneficial for students who have low reading abilities, are typically not engaged in the classroom, or are having behavior issues. With The Walking Classroom program, each student gets an audio device called a WalkKit that is preloaded with 167 standards-aligned podcasts suitable for students in grades 3 through 8. We also have some at-risk high school students using the program. Students go for a brisk walk together all listening to the same podcast at the same time. Upon returning to the classroom, the teacher can easily lead a post-walk discussion using a companion Teacher's Guide which has a lesson plan (including discussion questions) for each of the podcasts. We will present information provided from a team of researchers at UNC Chapel Hill about the positive impact on learning, longer term retention, and mood in connection with walking while listening to podcasts. Attendees will also have a chance to experience the program first hand during the session. Attendees will take home data about the effectiveness of this methodology, the powerful impact on behavior and engagement in the classroom, and information about how to apply for donated Walking Classroom materials.

5. **EVIDENCE:**

There is much information available about the favorable link between exercise and cognitive function. With respect to The Walking Classroom program specifically, in 2018 and 2019, UNC Chapel Hill researchers conducted three different assessments of The Walking Classroom program – a classroom research study (+300 students), an end-of-year survey of teachers and students using the program (over 300 educators and almost 2,500 students), and an evaluation of the improvement in health literacy for students before using The Walking Classroom compared with after using the program for a full school year (+1,000 students). The outcomes from these three studies confirm what we have been hearing for years from many of the over 2,000 teachers and afterschool facilitators who are using The Walking Classroom with their students--students who walk while listening to educational podcasts demonstrate better

learning of material, longer retention, better engagement in post walk discussions, better behavior and mood, AND improved health literacy.

**6. FORMAT:**

In an individual presentation, attendees will get information about the research-proven Walking Classroom program which highlights the many behavioral, health and academic benefits. We will provide a folder of flyers and will invite attendees to experience the program. All will have the opportunity to Walk Listen and Learn and will come away from the session with a free set of earbuds in pouch.

**7. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:**

Debra Ives, Executive Director, has been with The Walking Classroom Institute in Chapel Hill, NC since 2012 and has worked with the founder, Laura Fenn, to expand the reach of the program to over 2,000 teachers and OST professionals with over 75,000 students walking each year in all 50 states. Prior to joining The Walking Classroom Institute, Debra worked in development at The Emily Krzyzewski Center, an afterschool program based in Durham, NC.